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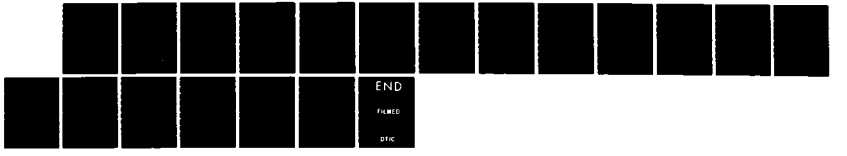

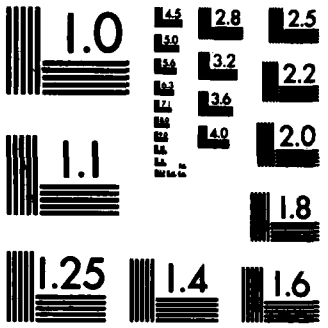

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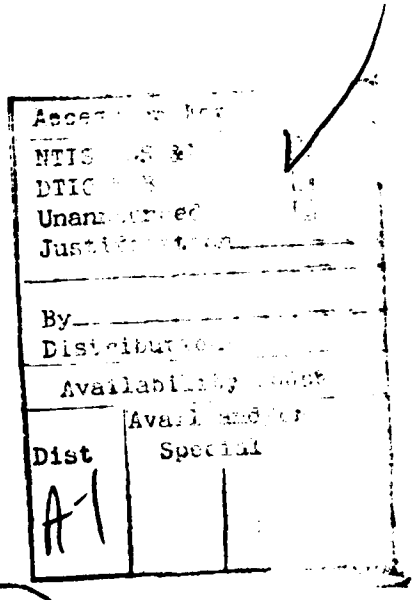

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EMERGING SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS FOR NATO'S NORTHERN FLANK*

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December 1984

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the northern flank nations have played quite conspicuous roles in East-West politics, although in very different ways. Norway and Denmark are charter members of NATO, Iceland joining shortly thereafter; all have been consistently supportive of NATO, albeit exercising low military profiles (e.g., neither Norway nor Denmark permits the peacetime location of nuclear weapons on their soil). Finland has traditionally acted as a buffer and broker between the Soviet Union and the other Scandinavian states, while Sweden has deliberately pursued a policy of strictly observed and well-armed neutrality. Although there have been some deviations from these general patterns, on the whole, they have held relatively constant in the post war years and need not be recounted at length here.[1] The consensus regarding the Northern Flank is that it represents a stable geographic area, the "quiet corner" of Europe, one relatively devoid of the East-West volatilities and tensions which have characterized other parts of the continent over the past thirty years.

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*Based upon the author's seminar *Le Flanc Nord et la Menace Sovietique,* presented on the invitation of General C. Fricaud-Chagnaud of the *Foundation pour les etudes de Defense Nationale,* at the *Hotel National des Invalides,* Paris, 1 October 1984. The seminar was arranged under the auspices of the United States Information Service, Paris. The author is appreciative of the comments of the participants, although the views expressed are ultimately his own.

[1]For details, see Holst (1984) and Bjol (1983).

However, within the past few years, increasing attention has been focused on the Northern Flank, even though for the most part, the prevailing post-war conditions in the region have not changed in any significant way. Sweden's Social Democratic Prime Minister Olof Palme has forcefully warned the Soviet Union to respect Swedish neutrality or pay the consequences (Moore, 1983; Kaza, 1984; Marshall, 1984) and Norway legitimately worries about the growing concentration of Soviet forces on the Kola Peninsula (Ulman, 1982; German, Fall 1982). U.S. Secretary of the Navy John Lehman has called the Kola Peninsula "The most valuable piece of real estate on earth" (Getler, 1982). U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger has personally visited the area and reconfirmed the American commitment to defend the region (Toth, 1983). Both academic (e.g., Posen, 1982; Arkin, 1984) and popular media (e.g., Andrews, 1984; Powell, 1983) are devoting their pages to Nordic defense dilemmas. This rather sudden prominence has occurred with little change in the political or military conditions which have traditionally predominated in the region. Therefore, one can wonder what conditions have been altered that have resulted in this heightened visibility and apparent importance of the Nordic nations.

The thesis of this paper is that, indeed, very little has happened within the Nordic region itself that would justify this new-found attention; the changes that have occurred are matters of degree rather than kind. If this is true, the underlying causes contributing to these recent attentions are not endemic to the region. Rather, this prominence is more the result of forces emanating from outside the Northern Flank that, for a variety of reasons, are reflected in geopolitical activities within the Scandinavian nations. As such, the Nordic nations are being enmeshed by exogenous phenomena--almost entirely in terms of the larger Soviet-American confrontation--that are seemingly well beyond their manipulation or control.

This paper will attempt to set out what these external forces might be and how they affect NATO's northern flank from both the political and military perspectives. First, however, it will briefly review some of the more recent indications of East-West involvement in the so-called Nordic balance nations: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.[2]

Even though these are distinctive nations and some play a more critical role than others, these states will not be examined individually in terms of their strategic doctrine, defense postures, military organizations, or political cultures.[3] Given their geographical and political proximities, they will be treated as a strategic entity, for, as Holst points out: "The Nordic area constitutes a geostrategic unity shaped by technological developments and the prevailing constellation of contending powers. It forms in addition a psychostrategic [*sic.*] unity shaped by a feeling of community and a recurrent nostalgia for Nordic separateness and autarky" (Holst, 1984: 202). Naturally, national distinctions will be drawn where appropriate. Nor will there be an attempt to draw "lessons learned" from Nordic military practices that might be potentially applicable to the alliance at large (Clarke, 1982).

RECENT EVENTS ON THE NORTHERN FLANK

Perhaps the most publicized set of events in the Northern Flank region within the past few years has been the consistent incursions of Soviet submarines into Sweden's territorial waters, even penetrating her guarded naval installations at Karlskrona. The grounding of the Soviet Whisky class submarine U-137 in October 1981 was only the most "visible" indication of Soviet submarine activity in the region. Consistent reports of Soviet submarines have continued to surface, both in Sweden and on Norway's west coast (Anonymous, April 1983). Tracks of miniature, tracked submersibles have been photographed within the Stockholm harbor. Sweden and Norway have responded with formal diplomatic protests to the Soviet Union (Cook, 1984), threats to destroy any submarines detected in their waters (Ries, April 1983; Feder, 1984), and increases in their *ASW* budgets, even under Social Democratic Prime Minister Palme (Kaza, 1984; Moore, 1983).

Western reports have conceivably overstressed the magnitude of Swedish reaction. For instance, even though the Swedish defense budget is devoting more funds to Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), these resources

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[2]Greenland is occasionally discussed in this vein but is not included in this survey.

[3]For instance, in the case of Sweden, these issues are well-addressed by Taylor (1982), Canby (1981), Ries (April 1983), and Ruth (1984), respectively.

are being diverted from a relatively constant and limited overall Swedish defense budget; i.e., no new defense spending is being allocated to ASW activities. And, as Bjol notes, there are domestic economic reasons as well for increasing the naval budget. Referring to the post-Whisky submarine increases, he observes: "In fact there was already serious underemployment in Swedish dockyards, and the Government had decided on a substantial building programme *prior* to the incident.... The increases cannot therefore be laid wholly at the door of U-137" (Bjol, 1983: 20; emphasis in original).

Still, even when balanced by Swedish internal concerns, overreporting, and especially underwater detection uncertainties, there is little doubt that the Swedish coastal waters have been increasingly visited by Soviet submarines over the past few years. The critical question, of course, is why (Bildt, 1983). The most sanguine answer is that these are merely Soviet training missions. More bleakly, some claim the Soviets are roaming Swedish home waters as a form of political pressure, although nobody is quite sure to what ends, that is, what would be the Soviets' political objectives. Others suggest that the Russian submarines are gathering information as a prelude to an armed attack against Sweden and are therefore actively probing--maybe even testing--Swedish maritime defenses. And a fourth school argues that the Soviet submarines are collecting topographical and oceanic data on the Swedish coastline in the event that their Navy might move into this area in the event of a larger war (Middleton, 1983; Mossberg, 1983). None of these explanations have proven dominant. The only thing that does seem clear is that Sweden's defense planning has been given a major impetus by the alleged Soviet submarine incursions (Ries, June 1983).

There is little question that the Soviet Union has placed sizable amounts of its strategic assets in the area of the Kola Peninsula, the region due east of the Norwegian-Soviet border. Almost sixty percent of the Soviet strategic submarine force is stationed in this region. Murmansk, Polyarnyy, and Severomorsk are the critical home ports for the Soviet ballistic submarine fleet. Holst claims that "The peninsula, in fact, contains the largest concentration of modern military force anywhere in the world. [In addition,] it provides important keys to the Soviet system of early warning and forward defense against air and

missile attacks" (Holst, 1984: 204). Therefore, it is not surprising that the Soviets have large troop emplacements in the area. Similarly, it is even less surprising that the Norwegians would be very conscious and wary of such buildups (Holst, 1981) and that they would attract the attention of the NATO allies. Specifically, British and Americans have assigned quick response troops (e.g., U.S. Marines) to the defense of Norway; Canada has a brigade exclusively dedicated to Norway; and the NATO ACE Mobile Force exercises every other year in Norway. The Norwegians have gone so far as to permit the pre-positioning of war materials (POMCUS) to facilitate the deployment of American troops should the need occur. None of these activities is particularly new, nor is the Soviet presence, as constituted, necessarily or unduly threatening. Still, taken in toto, this condition does increase the visibility of the problems observed on the Northern Flank.

Recent economic conditions in the Nordic region have urged the Swedes and even the Fins to look increasingly towards the West in terms of trade. This development is most pronounced in the case of Finland which has made major investments in the West while moving away from trade with the Soviet Union. In the first quarter of 1984, "exports to the West by Finnish companies rose 32% from a year earlier. Trade with the Soviet Union--still Finland's largest single trading partner--dropped 20%" (Moore, 1984). Even though the Fins are careful not to link foreign trade with foreign policy, thus arousing Soviet suspicions (Korhonen, 1980), the perceived Finnish accretion towards the West has been the source of some Russian attention. A second, and more important new economic condition in the region is, of course, the development of the Norwegian North Sea oil fields. A decade ago, the North Sea oil fields were only a gleam in Norwegian eyes; now they are an immensely valuable strategic commodity. Not only do the fields represent important sources of income but, as a consequence, they also require assets being set aside to protect against their vulnerability. Finally, depressed economic conditions in Iceland (largely due to its financial dependence on fishing), combined with the Icelandic dependence on Soviet petroleum, have caused some Western analysts to worry about the security of Iceland as the linchpin of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) bridge (Osnos, July 1983).

The European debates over the 1979 NATO dual track decision and intermediate range nuclear forces (INF) have not gone unnoticed in the NATO nations of the Northern Flank. Both Norway and Denmark supported the original dual track decision but since then, their support has seriously wavered. The Norwegian Labour Party (presently out of power) has stated its opposition to Euromissile deployment, regardless of the outcome of the INF negotiations (Gleditsch, 1983). In 1982, the Norwegian contribution to the Euromissile deployment fund only passed in the Norwegian *Storting* by a single vote. In 1983, Norwegian public opinion polls showed sixty percent of the population opposed to deployment (Anonymous, November 1983). Still, as yet, the government has chosen not to withdraw its support for the dual track decision, but the backing is clearly precarious. Flora Lewis (1984) refers to Denmark as the "footnote state," in which "every NATO communique on nuclear issues has to carry a footnote saying the Danish Government reserves its position." Danish politicians have been less circumspect in their INF opposition than any of the other NATO nations. In 1982, the government eliminated its financial contributions to Euromissile deployment and its political support would be severely tested were it brought to an actual vote (Osnos, May 1983).

The military impact of the Norwegian and Danish "defections" from the NATO missile arrangement would almost surely be minimal; neither nation was to emplace Pershing IIs or cruise missiles in any case. However, the political equivocations of Norway and Denmark could produce a ripple phenomenon that could, in turn, affect other European nations and political parties where the dual track decision is still a contentious issue. The obvious candidates would be the Netherlands and Belgium, with the Federal Republic's Social Democrats and Britain's Labourites lurking in the background. Thus, NATO strategists are closely watching Norway and Denmark in regards to their continuing Euromissile commitments.

Finally, for a combination of reasons, there has been a renewed interest within the Nordic nations for a Nordic Nuclear Free Zone (NNFZ). This, of course, is nothing new. Finland has traditionally proposed a NNFZ, usually with the encouragement of the Soviet Union

(Mottola, 1983). In more recent years, Norway has been active in exploring the possibility of a nuclear free zone (German, Summer 1982). Some analysts suggest that present conditions both within and without the region argue strongly against such a treaty at this time (Archer, 1983). Still, the renewed interest in a NNFZ has served to refocus the attention of many NATO analysts on the Nordic region.

Taken individually, none of these conditions and trends are markedly new or particularly threatening, either to the nations of the Nordic region or the NATO alliance as a whole. Taken in sum, the trend would appear to be more ominous, but hardly one which would necessarily attract the level of attention and diplomatic activities one has observed devoted lately to the region. What then are the geopolitical factors that have turned the spotlight of the NATO defense luminaries to its Northern Flank?

ENDOGENOUS FACTORS AFFECTING THE NORDIC REGION

One can identify four issues which have their origins outside the Nordic region that have prompted NATO policymakers to turn their attentions to the Scandinavian nations. These are:

- Inflammability of the Central Front
- Continued U.S./Soviet Hostility
- Conventional and Protracted Warfare Doctrines
- INF Controversy

These will be discussed individually although, of course, they are hardly independent phenomena.

If there is one item of faith that most NATO observers can agree upon, it is that the most disastrous of all consequences would most likely result from a superpower conflict over Central Europe. There is at present scant confidence that the West could repulse a Soviet invasion with strictly conventional forces or without surrendering large amounts of geography. Similarly, even with the on-going debate over the first use of nuclear weapons, there is little reason to believe that nuclear weapons would not be introduced into the conflict (by which side is almost irrelevant), especially if NATO armies were being summarily

defeated by Warsaw Pact troops. Finally, once nuclear weapons have been employed--even on what was thought to be a limited basis--there is even less reason to believe that a strategic nuclear exchange would not eventually follow, resulting in its almost incalculable loss of life. The last step has been certified by the size and security of the nuclear arsenals and delivery systems of the two superpowers. Mutual assured destruction is a given, certainly for Europe, and only slightly less surely for the Soviet and American homelands. In short, a central front conflict would have such potentially horrendous consequences that it is virtually unimaginable that any of the Warsaw Pact or NATO nations would countenance any war at any level in that region. Simply, the central front is too inflammable for war to occur there. It follows, then, that *if* there are to be any conflicts between the Soviets and the United States, they would happen in other regions of the world.

One of the likely candidates for such an outbreak would be NATO's Northern Flank. Certainly this is not a new condition; wargamers have long presented a Soviet invasion of Norway across and down the Kola peninsula as one of their favorite initiating scenarios. What is novel is the understanding that the Central Front is now so firmly set in strategic concrete and that either superpower would destroy the other should a conflict occur in that region. Hence, there is little recourse when examining possible U.S./Soviet conflict than to look elsewhere. The very stability of the central front forces one to turn analytic attention to other regions of the globe with more seriousness than was previously the case. The Nordic region is an immediate candidate because of its geographic proximity to the main theater of conflict and its growing strategic importance. "The North, more than ever, must be seen as an extension of the Central Front in Europe." (Corddry, 1982: 160) Thus, one finds analysts like Posen (1982) describing "Escalation and NATO's Northern Flank." The emphasis is particularly striking because of the lack of previous work addressing the region in this context from either the NATO or Soviet perspectives (excepting, possibly, Myers, 1979, and Hegge, 1979).

These fears might not be so overt were it not for the continued--some would say increased--stridency of the exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although there is little agreement as to

the consequences of the current U.S./S.U. diatribes, there is little doubt that the dispute between the superpowers has surrendered most of the elements of detente which were present in the previous decade. The hostility of the superpowers, combined with the stability enforced in the central front, suggests that if some type of conflict were to occur, it would not be unlikely to break out within the Nordic region. The increased strategic importance of the Northern region to Soviet planners because of their SSBN installations and, hence, to U.S. defense policymakers reinforces this observation.

One of the major trends in U.S. strategic thinking over the past five years has been the evolution of the idea of protracted nuclear conflict. While the geneses of this development can easily be traced back through two or three administrations (e.g., Schlesinger's NSDM-242 and Brown's PD-59), the statement and implementation of such a doctrine and its operational implications have been most articulate from the Reagan Administration spokespersons. Secretary of Defense Weinberger in his annual posture statements has been clear--almost adamant--about the Administration's plans to improve American capabilities to engage in prolonged conflict at any level with the Soviets (also see Halloran, 1981, 1982). As an integral part of this strategy, the Administration has proposed initiating second (or multiple) front operations to disrupt Soviet actions in Europe (Perry et al., 1984). Secretary of Defense Weinberger's 1984 Defense Guidance states that "Emphasis will be given to offensive moves against Warsaw Pact flanks to force diversion of Pact resources from the Central Front" (quoted in Arkin, 1984: 5). Secretary of the Navy Lehman has specifically identified the Norwegian Sea as a potential candidate for such U.S. activities. Noting the Soviet's concentration of strategic submarine assets in the Barents Sea and the Kola Peninsula, Lehman has said that

> just having the [American] capability [to attack the Russians in that region] forces the Soviets to strengthen their northern flank, which is so vulnerable and so valuable.... They have to divert long-range air forces out of the central front.... That's a tremendous bit of leverage because they can't afford to lose that. They'd lose their whole strategic submarine fleet if they lose Kola (quoted in Getler, 1982).

Elsewhere, Lehman has written to Congress that "some [U.S.] SSNs will carry the battle to the enemy's home waters and adjacent sea areas as necessary to engage the Soviet submarine fleet before it can disperse and threaten our battle groups and sea lanes" (quoted in Arkin, 1984: 6).

There is little reason, then, to doubt that Administration strategic doctrine has chosen the Northern Flank as a potential campaign arena strictly on the grounds of the theory which, per force, underlies prolonged conflict. This apparent doctrinal preference is supported by operational implications as well. One of the major tenets to protracted conflict is the importance of sea lines of communications (SLOCs), in this case, the vital transportation links between the United States and Europe, necessary to resupply NATO. These SLOCs, especially in the North Atlantic, must remain open--i.e., free from Soviet submarine or naval air interdiction--for NATO to fight beyond its inplace munition supplies. Soviet submarines hidden in the Norwegian fjords would have much freer access to the North Atlantic SLOCs; and long-range Soviet naval aviation based in Norway, especially if armed with cruise missiles, would further threaten the SLOCs and NATO's ability to protect them. Thus, the Nordic region assumes great new importance and a much more critical role than the region would have had under a MAD regime. This is because the Soviet interdiction capabilities could no longer be "bottled up" behind the GIUK bridge so that they could not endanger the North Atlantic SLOCs. This possibility was acknowledged in the 1984 Defense Guidance, which presented the objective of the U.S Atlantic strategy as "Military superiority, primarily naval and air, over, on, and under the sea in areas such as the Norwegian Sea, the Greenland-Iceland-Norway gap, the North and Atlantic sea lines of communication, and in the mid-Atlantic" (quoted in Arkin, 1984: 5).

Taken by itself, these statements might be seen merely representing an altered matter of degree, as not much more than a renewed emphasis on northern flank operational plans that had long been present in U.S.-NATO contingency planning. After all, the GIUK gap has always been viewed as a vital choke point against Soviet submarine entry into the North Atlantic; memories of the German submarine wolfpack successes in the two

World Wars were scarcely forgotten. What marks this emphasis as quite new are two elements. First, with the substitution of warfighting for war-deterring postures, the protection of the SLOCs is absolutely vital. Second, U.S. defense policymakers are no longer willing to abide by passive defensive measures, such as enhancing the GIUK SONSUS network. Much more active, aggressive actions have been proposed. Navy Admiral Baggett testified that "Our preferred approach is to destroy enemy bombers before they can reach missile launch range by intercepting them in the outer defense zone [i.e,, in the region of the Kola Peninsula]" (quoted in Arkin, 1984: 5). While some of this could be excused as budget rhetoric, its obvious thrust and geographic direction cannot be overlooked.

In addition, the Reagan Administration's avowal of prolonged conflict might partially explain the increased Soviet submarine activities in the Baltic (also off the west coast of Norway). During an extended conflict, the Soviet Baltic fleet would be at great risk to NATO surveillance and follow-on PGM attacks. Furthermore, a breakout of the Soviet Baltic fleet past the extremely narrow straits adjacent to Denmark and into the North Atlantic could be prohibitively expensive. As a result, the Soviet fleet might choose to disperse within the Baltic itself and would therefore benefit from the most recent information regarding the Baltic coastlines. It would stand to reason, then, that the commanders of the Soviet Baltic fleet would put great stock in obtaining up-to-date information on the Swedish fjords as possible havens for its ships should a protracted conflict occur, even at the current cost of Swedish diplomatic protests.

For these reasons, as Reagan Administration spokespersons discuss protracted conflict and its operational implications, the importance of the Northern Flank region will increase as a direct function of the requirements of multifront and extended conflicts. Most of this is reflected in the increased naval activity which would be generated from and within its waters.

Lastly, U.S.-Soviet and intra-NATO INF controversies have manifested themselves in the Nordic nations. For instance, U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. James Watkins testified before the House Armed Services Seapower Subcommittee that the massive 1984 Soviet naval

exercises in the Baltic and Norwegian Seas were "in response to the U.S. deployment of nuclear missiles in NATO countries" (quoted in Andrews, 1984). As noted above, both Norway and Denmark originally subscribed to the 1979 NATO dual-track missile emplacement decision and have since vacillated in their support. The military effect of this declining support is almost imperceptible; neither nation had agreed to emplace any Euromissiles on their territory, although they were contributing funds to finance the missiles in other nations. INF is, in many senses, a storm that is raging over the heads of the Nordic NATO nations, at least in a military sense. But, in a political sense, Norway and Denmark could have a telling influence on the intra-NATO INF disputes, for the disavowal of their earlier dual track commitment could potentially lead to the unraveling of the NATO INF tapestry. NATO policymakers are listening closely to the Norwegian *Storting* debates and cautioning that the Danish position is unique, but the denouement is still uncertain. Hence, the essential nature of the INF drama--even though not performed in Stockholm, Oslo, or Copenhagen--has elevated the nominally bit parts of the Nordic actors to those of central characters.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This paper has attempted to explain why Europe's "quiet corner" has of late assumed a greater significance and visibility in the context of East-West politics. It seemed apparent that this new prominence is not a set of circumstances or conditions that the Nordic nations would have consciously chosen if given their preferences. The Scandinavian nations have not shrunk from international involvements--witness the traditional Swedish commitments to international and often hazardous peacekeeping efforts--but it seems that, in this case, Nordic domestic politics relating to world politics have been captured by NATO and superpower controversies over which the individual nations of the area have little control or say.

While the immediate manifestations of the renewed emphasis on the Northern Flank, such as Soviet submarine incursions, might abate, one could easily argue that a return to the more halcyonic--i.e., relatively neglected--days are not imminent. Other disputes can be foreseen, such as the issue of air space violations that NATO SLCMs might occur or more

serious negotiations over a Nordic Nuclear Free Zone. Given their influence upon internal Nordic politics, the major question for U.S. and NATO defense policymakers is what the future roles for the Northern Flank nations might be. More specifically, with certain allowances for attention cycles, will the Northern Flank be permitted to return to the strategic periphery or will it continue to occupy its new set of roles? The latter contingency would appear to be more likely. If that is the case, then it would seem necessary to pay greater attention to the particular political sensitivities of these nations, such as the positions of the Scandivanian Social Democratic parties.

This paper does not pretend to have immediate or ready answers to these types of policy questions. Rather, its objective was more to alert NATO observers to the forces active in the Nordic area and to raise pertinent issues as they pertain to these problems. At this stage, any conclusions would be premature, for the both the exogenous and endogenous elements affecting the region are too much in flux for confident policy to be suggested, let alone executed.

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